

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE FOUNDER OF WAHHABISM

By

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The most serious damage to the shrine of Imam al-Hussain (ع) in Kerbala, Iraq, was inflicted by the Wahhabis, followers of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab who invented an odd interpretation of Islam which does not respect the grave-sites of any holy person, including that of the Prophet of Islam (ص). Since the Wahhabis have proven to be the most antagonistic¹ towards the followers of Ahl al-Bayt (ع), it is not out of place here to introduce the reader to their man, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, while narrating the mischief he and his ignorant Bedouin zealots committed against the shrine of Imām Hussain (ع) in Kerbalā' and that of his father, Imām Ali (ع), in Najaf.

Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab was born in 1115 A.H./1703 A.D. in the small town of Uyayna in Najd, the southern highland of Arabia's interior, and died in 1206 A.H./1791-92 A.D. He belonged to the tribe of Tamim. His father was a lawyer and a pious Muslim adhering to the Hanbalite sect founded by Imām Ahmed ibn Hanbal who, with the most rigid consistency, had advocated the principle of the exclusive validity of the *hadīth* as against the inclination among the older sects to make concessions to reason and commonsense,

¹Such antagonism has proven to be bloody especially in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Wahabbis also justify the killing of other Sunnis who do not subscribe to their beliefs as they have done in Iraq.

especially since Islam is the religion of commonsense. In Baghdad, Muhammed learned the jurisprudence of the Hanbali Sunni sect which remains to be predominant among the people of Najd and Hijaz: Whabbis constitute no more than 8% of the entire population of today's Saudi Arabia, the only country in the world named after its ruling clan. The reader has already come to know how much distortion exists in *hadīth* and can appreciate the danger of believing in each and every *hadīth* as though it were the inviolable and irrefutable gospel truth. He also studied jurisprudence at Mecca and Medīna where his mentors were admirers of Ibn Taymiyyah who, in the 7th Century A.H./the 14th Century A.D., had revived the teachings of Imām Ahmed ibn Hanbal. The founder of the sect, the last in the series of the four Sunni sects, namely Ahmed ibn Hanbal, was a theologian born in and died in Baghdad; the year of his birth is 164 A.H./780 A.D. and that of his death is 241 A.H./855 A.D.

Since his childhood, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab was influenced by the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah² and, therefore, looked askance at many religious practices of the people of Najd (southern section of today's kingdom of the Wahhabi Al Saud clan). Such an influence convinced him that the dominant form of contemporary Islam, particularly among the Turks of his time, was permeated with

²Ibn Taymiyyah, mentor of Wahhabis and Takfiris, is Ahmed ibn Abdul-Halim ibn Abdul-Salam ibn Abdullāh al-Khidr, "Taqiyy ad-Din," "Abul-Abbās," a Hanbali scholar who was born in Harran (ancient Carrhae where Mudar Arabs lived, a town built by Harran brother of prophet Abraham [ع] from whom it derived its name), Iraq, in 661 A.H./1263 A.D. and died inside a Damascus, Syria, prison in 728 A.H./1328 A.D. He had his own radical and un-orthodox way of interpreting *hadīth* which was different from everyone else's, distinguishing him from all other scholars of jurisprudence. Those who adopt his views are called "Salafis," followers of the "salaf," the "pious" predecessors. He is on the record as the first person to disbelieve in intercession (*shafaa*). For more details, refer to the 463-page book titled *Ibn Taymiyyah* by Sa'ib Abdul-Hamid, published in Arabic in Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran, by the Ghadr Center for Islamic Studies. There are many fanatical groups in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan that adopt this "Salafi" ideology disseminated by government-sponsored Saudi mis-sionary activities and funded by petro-dollars.

abuses. He, therefore, sought to restore the original purity of the doctrine and of life in its restricted milieu. The facts that the Wahhabis are the minority of all Muslim minorities, and that the people of Najd and Hijaz are still predominantly Hanbalites who do not subscribe to Wahhabism by choice, prove that he did not achieve his objective and, most likely, such an objective will never be achieved despite all Saudi Arabia's petro-dollars and the abundance of those who solicit such dollars, the ruler-appointed preachers most of whom are Salafis.

Having joined his father, with whom he debated his personal views, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab caused a seriously violent confrontation to erupt from such an exchange of opposite views, for his father's views were consistent with mainstream Hanbali Muslim thought. He performed the pilgrimage for the first time, visiting Mecca and Medīna where he attended lectures on different branches of Islamic learning. His mentors included Abdullāh ibn Ibrahim ibn Saif and Hayat as-Sindi, who both were admirers of Ibn Taymiyyah. They both rejected the principle of *taqlid* (imitation) which is commonly accepted by all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence as well as by Shī'a Muslims. These men's teachings had a great impact on Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab who began to take a more aggressive attitude in preaching his views and, hence, he publicly expressed his denunciation of the sanctification of the holy precincts of the Prophet's shrine and of the shrines of any "saint." Then he went back home and decided to go to Basra, Iraq, on his way to Damascus, Syria. During his stay in Basra, he expressed the same views, whereupon its people kicked him out of the city. He almost died of thirst once, due to exhaustion and to the intensity of the heat in the desert, when he was on his way from Basra to the city of Zubair but was saved by a Zubairi man. Finding his provisions insufficient to travel to Damascus, Muhammed had to change his travel plan and to go to the (Saudi) al-Ahsa (or al-Hasa) province then to Huraymala, one of the cities of Najd, to which his father and

the entire family had to move because of the public's denunciation of young Muhammed's views, reaching it in 1139 A.H./1726-27 A.D. By then, Muhammed's good and pious father had lost his job as *qadi* (judge) on account of his son's radical preaching. The denunciation continued till his father's death in 1153 A.H./1740 A.D.

His father's death emboldened him to express his thoughts more freely and consolidate his movement. His preaching found an echo among some of the people of his town, and his fame started on the rise, so much so that he was welcomed by the ruler of his home town Uyayna, namely Othman ibn Muammar Al Hamad, who offered him protection and appointed him as his personal assistant. In order to cement his ties with Othman, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab married Jawhara, Othman's aunt. Othman ordered his townsmen to observe the Wahhabi teachings, and Muhammed now felt strong enough to demolish the monument erected on the burial site of Zaid ibn al-Khattab. But the new alliance between Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab and Othman ibn Muammar Al Hamad disturbed the scholars of Najd who complained against the first to the emir (provincial governor) of the al-Ahsa province. The emir wrote Othman reprimanding and warning him of dire consequences for encouraging Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab to revolt against the established authority and creed. Finding himself in a precarious situation and his job in jeopardy, Othman dismissed Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab from his service and asked him to leave the town.

In 1160 A.H./1746-47 A.D., having been expelled from Uyayna, Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab sought refuge in Dar'iyya, only six hours away from Uyayna, at the invitation of its ruler, Muhammed ibn Saud³, ancestor of the Al Saud dynasty now ruling Saudi Arabia.

³The correct pronunciation of "Saud" is Sa'ood," but we will stick to the commonly used spelling of this word.

Muhammed ibn Saud lived in a fortified settlement as chief of the Unayza clan. Soon, an alliance was forged between both men, each promising the other glory, fame, and riches for his support. The people of that town lived at the time in utter destitution, and something was needed to bring them relief. Muhammed ibn Saud rejected any veneration of the Prophet (ﷺ) or of other men of piety. It was there that Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab stayed for more than two years. Both men felt that it was time to declare “jihad” against all those who rejected the new Wahhabi dogma, forming a small band of raiders mounted on horseback to invade various towns, kill and loot. The lives and property of all those who did not subscribe to the views of these two men were now in jeopardy for they were considered as guilty of being pagans fighting against whom is justified by the Qur’ān until they converted or extirpated. These raids extended far beyond Dar’iyya to include all of Najd and parts of Yemen, Hijaz, Syria and Iraq. In 1187 A.H./1773 A.D., the principality of Riyadh fell to them, marking a new era in the lucrative career of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab.

During a short period of time, the destitutes of Dar’iyya found themselves wearing sumptuous clothes, carrying weapons decorated with gold and silver, eating meat, and baking wheat bread; in short, they found their dreams come true, going from rags to riches, thanks to those raids which continued till Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab died in 1206 A.H./1791-92 A.D., leaving his band to carry out more and more raids and his form of “Wahhabism” embraced by the Al Saud clansmen who eventually ascended to power, due to the support they received from the British who used them to undermine the last Islamic power, the Ottoman Sultanate. Al Saud became the sole rulers of Najd and Hijaz, promoting and publicizing for Wahhabism by any and all means, spending in the process funds which belong to the Muslim masses, not to them.

After the death of Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab, his band of raiders, under the leadership of the Al Saud dynasty, pursued their

campaigns in the pretext of disseminating Wahhabism. In the years that followed Muhammed ibn Abdul-Wahhab's death, the Wahhabis gradually became burdensome to their neighbors. They pursued their northward advance; therefore, the Pasha of Baghdad found himself compelled to take defensive measures against them, having heard about their ruthlessness and disregard for the lives of all non-Wahhabis. He, therefore, led an army of about seven thousand Turks and twice did his army of mostly Arabs attacked them in their richest and most fertile oasis, that of al-Ahsa, in 1212 A.H./1797 A.D. but did not move on their capital, Dar'iyya, at once, as he should have, laying a siege for a month to the citadel of al-Ahsa. When Muhammed ibn Saud himself advanced against the Pasha, the latter did not dare to attack him but concluded a six-year peace treaty with him, a treaty for which the Wahhabis later demonstrated their disregard. By then, they had already set their eyes on plundering the shrine of Imām Hussain (ع) and all the valuable relics it contained.

On the anniversary of the historic Ghadīr Khumm incident, that is, Thul-Hijja 18, 1216 A.H./April 21, 1801 A.D.⁴, Prince Saud mobilized an army of twenty thousand strong and invaded the holy city of Kerbalā'. First they laid a siege of the city then entered the city and brutally massacred its defenders, visitors and inhabitants, looting, burning, demolishing and wreaking havoc ... The city [Kerbalā'] fell into their hands. The magnificent domed building over the grave of Hussain was destroyed and enormous booty dragged off.⁵

More than five thousand Muslims were slaughtered. Then the Saudi

⁴Other references consulted for this book indicate that the said attack was carried out on Thul-Hijja 14, 1215 A.H./April 28, 1801 A.D., but we are of the view that the above date is more accurate.

⁵Carl Brockelmann, ed., *History of the Islamic Peoples* (London, 1980), p. 354.

prince turned to the Kerbalā' shrine itself; he and his men pulled gold slabs out of their places, stole chandeliers and Persian rugs and historical relics, plundering anything of value. This tragedy is immortalized by eulogies composed by poets from Kerbalā' and elsewhere. And the Wahhabis did not leave Kerbalā' alone after this massacre; rather, they continued for the next twelve years invading it, killing and looting, taking advantage of the administrative weakness of the aging Ottoman Sultanate responsible for protecting it. During those twelve years, more and more Bedouin tribes joined them for a "piece of the action." In 1218 A.H./1803 A.D., during the time of hajj (pilgrimage), the Wahhabis, led by Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, attacked Mecca, which surrendered to them after putting up a brief resistance. They looted whatever possessions the pilgrims had had. The governor of Mecca, Sharif Ghalib, fled to Jiddah which was shortly thereafter besieged, and the leader of the Syrian pilgrim caravan, Abd-Allāh Pasha of Damascus, had to leave Mecca, too. On Rajab 19, 1218 A.H./November 4, 1803, Abdul-Aziz Al Saud paid with his life for what he had committed; he was killed in Dar'iyya. His son, Saud ibn Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, lifted the siege of Jiddah and had Sharif Ghalib sent back to Mecca as his vassal in exchange for Jiddah's customs revenue.

In 1220 A.H./1805 and 1221 A.H./1806 A.D., Mecca and Medīna fell to the Wahhabis⁶ respectively. The Wahhabis unleashed their wrath on both holy cities, committing untold atrocities and razing the cemetery, where many relatives and *sahāba* (companions) of the Prophet (ﷺ) were buried, to the ground⁷. Having spread their

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷The Wahhabis have carried out their campaigns against the burial grounds of the Prophet's family and companions well into the next century. For example, in 1343 A.H./1924 A.D., they demolished the grave-sites of many family members and companions (*sahāba*) of the Prophet (ﷺ) against the wish and despite the denunciation of the adherents of all other Muslim sects world-wide. And in 1413 A.H./1993, they also demolished the house of Khadija, wife of Prophet Muhammed (ﷺ), as well as the house where the Prophet (ﷺ) had been born, which stood approximately 50 meters

control over Riyadh, Jiddah, Mecca and Medīna, all of today's Saudi Arabia became practically under their control.

The next major invasion of the holy city of Kerbalā' by the Wahhabis took place on the 9th of the holy month of Ramadan of 1225 A.H., corresponding to October 8, 1810 A.D. It was then that both Kerbalā' and Najaf (where the magnificent shrine of Imām Ali ibn Abū Talib (ع) is located) were besieged. Roads were blocked, pilgrims were looted then massacred, and the shrines were attacked and damaged. The details of this second invasion were recorded by an eyewitness: Sayyid Muhammed Jawad al-Āmili, author of the famous book of jurisprudence titled *Miftah al-Karama* which was completed shortly after midnight on the very first day when the siege was laid. The writer recorded how terrified he and the other residents of Kerbalā' felt at seeing their city receiving a major attack from the Wahhabis. A large number of pilgrims were killed. Their number varies from one account to another, and the most realistic figure seems to be the one provided by Sayyid Muhammed Jawad al-Āmili who puts it at one hundred and fifty.

The Wahhabis no longer attack and demolish Imām Hussain's shrine, but they have been relentlessly attacking the creed of those who venerate him through a flood of books written and printed world-wide. They fund their writing, publication and circulation. They sometimes distribute them free of charge during the annual pilgrimage season while prohibiting all pilgrims from carrying or distributing any literature at all... During recent years, they have been beheading Shī'ite scholars wherever they can find them, destroying Shī'ite shrines, such as the famous 'Askari Shrine in Samarra, Iraq, which was bombed and destroyed in February of 2006 and in June of 2007; it houses the remains of both Imām Ali al-Hadi and Hassan al-'Askari, peace be with them, who descended

northward from Khadija's house, turning both of them into public bathrooms...

from the immediate family of the Prophet of Islam, peace and blessings of the Almighty be with him and his progeny. Many other Shī'ite mosques and Hussainiyyas were bombed by the Wahhabis and are still targets of their mischief, yet these rogues will never be able to destroy Shī'ite Islam till the Resurrection Day. They have plenty of money, so they send their filthy money to Iraq to get the Muslims to kill each other, the Shī'ite to kill the Sunni and vice versa, thus making Satan the happiest being on earth, for nothing pleases this damned creature more than seeing Muslims at each other's throats. Such is the desire of all the enemies of Islam and Muslims. Actually, due to the barbarism of these fundamentalist Wahhabis, more and more Muslims are getting to be curious about Shī'ite Islam, so they study it and many of them end up eventually switching their sect from Sunni to Shī'ite Islam. There is no harm in a Sunni becoming Shī'ite or in a Shī'ite becoming Sunni: Islam is one tree stalk having two major branches. After all, religions of the world have sects, and people change the sect they follow according to their personal convictions and satisfaction. It happens every day, and nobody fusses about it. Thus, the Wahhabis' mischief is actually having the opposite result of what these fundamentalist fanatics, who have ruined the reputation of Islam and Muslims world-wide, anticipate.